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BODY:

I have always been out front and vocal about my opposition to legalizing slots. The fact that the state is struggling to balance a \$ 1.8 billion budget deficit does not dim my opposition one iota.

Nevada's governor, Kenny C. Guinn, has called reliance on gambling "fool's gold." In the state, where big-time legalized gambling was born, its governor says his state's fiscal structure is almost as chancy as roulette. Gambling revenue is neither steady nor stable. It rises and falls.

Maryland's fiscal analysts have described the Ehrlich administration's estimate of slot revenues as "dangerously optimistic." But even if the administration's slot revenue figures are right, the state will still have budget shortfalls running into hundreds of millions of dollars for years to come. The administration's best revenue estimate will provide only enough revenue to just only 50 percent of the Thornton Education Plan. The lesson we should learn from Nevada is that a state cannot gamble its way to fiscal stability.

My opposition to legalized slots does not stem from their unreliable revenue returns. My opposition comes from the economic chaos and human tragedy legalized slots will spawn. Growing up in Charles County, I learned firsthand about the human anguish that easy access to gambling brings.

Here in Southern Maryland, slots were everywhere -- in restaurants, bars, drugstores and gas stations. For over two decades, slots were the backbone and bane of Southern Maryland's economy. In the long run, slots actually retarded Southern Maryland's economy. Slots lowered incomes, increased unemployment and boosted the area's welfare tab. When slots were banned in 1968, Southern Maryland's economy underwent a torturous rehabilitation during the next several years. Indeed, growing up in Charles County, I saw slots' negative impact on families, including my own.

Setting aside \$ 500,000 a year to treat compulsive gamblers, as the Ehrlich administration proposes, is tantamount to shutting the barn door after the horse has escaped. The National Gambling Impact Study Commission estimated that approximately 7.5 million adults could be considered pathological or problem gamblers.

Although the general public may draw a sharp line between slots and casinos, it is a sharp line that does not actually exist. Slots are a casino's main source of revenue, contributing 80 percent or more of the total revenue of a casino.

The argument that slots will help save Maryland horse racing is a blatant smoke screen. Racing has been on life support for decades. Slots won't save Maryland horse racing. What slots will do is give the track owners a new and better revenue-producing business. Let's face it, legalized slots are legalized theft that robs from the poor and gives to the rich. Slot machines are fixed to give owners 70 percent to 90 percent of the take.

The 1999 report of the National Gambling Impact Study Commission hit the nail on the head when it concluded that "Governments too often focus on the shortsighted pursuit of revenues, [rather] than the long-term impact of decisions on the public welfare."

Certainly, legalized slots produce revenue, but the dollars they generate pale before the crime corruption, business failures, family breakups, bankruptcies and loan defaults that come as a natural consequence of slots. To turn to slots to solve our budget deficit and our education funding is to embark on a foolhardy journey down a disastrous road. It is irresponsible government policy at its worst.

Thomas "Mac" Middleton

State Senator, Charles County

Waldorf

Upon reading your article expressing concerns about the Blessing of the Bikes in North Beach, I felt compelled to reply. It is with measure of frustration and disappointment that I write this letter.

I have been a resident of Southern Maryland for 22 years, 17 of which were spent in Twin Beaches. Although my family and I have relocated to the southern part of the county, we still feel we are a part of the beach community. We still attend St. Anthony's Catholic Church and are an active part of the parish, as we have been since 1985.

There are allusions in your article that North Beach is becoming more of a family town. I would suggest that it has been a family town all along. I realize the demographics of the town have changed dramatically in the past 20 years. The population of the county has tripled in that time, bringing with it an influx of more upwardly mobile professionals.

Back in 1985, however, there was a large segment of the populace who, like myself, worked in the construction trades and rode motorcycles. Many of these people and their families still live here, and many of them have attended the last two Blessing of the Bikes.

I'm not sure what [Town Council members] Mrs. [Denise] Phelps or Ms. [Barbara] Gray expected to see when they went down to the boardwalk last year or what it was Mrs. Phelps saw that disturbed her so. I saw families in the motorcycling community enjoying one another's company and two respected members of the religious community bestowing their blessings on those families and their vehicles. Maybe Mrs. Phelps was intimidated because she didn't know anyone there. Perhaps she should introduce herself to her constituents next time.

Bob Spanburgh

Port Republic

It appears the answer to the question of "What are the appropriate uses for Chapman Forest?" had already been

decided two years ago when the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) appointed a citizens advisory group, along with several working subgroups, to develop a management plan for the Chapman's Landing property.

Prior to the state's purchase of Chapman's Landing, a small, but very vocal group of no-growth advocates were very influential in lobbying for the purchase. Later, after the state acquired the property, it again appears that many of these same advocates were then appointed to write the plan to agree with that predetermined answer to the question in the name of environmental and historic preservation of 2,200 acres of economically pristine property in western Charles County, and also, coincidentally, in the designated northwestern Charles County Planned Development District.

These advocates are all intelligent, respectable and basically good people. They have the best of intentions. They have had a mission, and you have to admire their determination to win.

However, it seems that they could be out of touch with many of today's realities. Many of these group members are senior citizens, well-to-do, retired with pensions and do not depend on the local economy for their livelihood. They would like to see things stay the way they were when they were involved in the mainstream in years past. They are not the owners of the Indian Head businesses struggling to keep the doors open with a lack of a local customer base to generate revenue to pay the bills. They haven't gone into a lending institution to ask for a loan to make repairs or improvements to their business, only to learn that an Indian Head business is not a good lending risk because of the high number of business failures there. They do not have to spend hours each day driving to and from Washington or Northern Virginia during rush-hour traffic to good paying high-tech and other professional jobs that are not available locally.

Other members of these advisory groups are not local or even Charles County residents. Yet we continue to allow their no-growth input to have such a detrimental impact on our local economic issues. These people sincerely believe that "No Growth" equals "Smart Growth" -- a theory they apparently sold to our previous governor as well.

The corporate town of Indian Head has been experiencing dire economic problems because of this no growth in the immediate area of western Charles County. The state's purchase of Chapman's Landing exacerbated that problem. Several business establishments were hanging on in hopes of Chapman's Landing being developed and generating a customer base in the immediate area. That didn't happen and since 1999, many of those businesses have closed. None of this impacted those "No Growth" members of the Chapman's Citizens Advisory Group.

They appear to be totally unconcerned and insensitive to the economic needs of the Indian Head community.

Two years ago it was suggested to DNR that there was still ample opportunity to "save the environmentally sensitive and historic property" on Chapman's Landing as well as "provide for controlled development of other portions" of the 2,200 acres to assist Indian Head in its plight. However, the previous state administration had already decided that this consideration was not an option for the property and that neither commercial, business nor residential development would be further discussed in this forum.

Today, the state is experiencing a severe financial deficit. With budget projections showing approximately a \$ 1.5 billion deficit in 2003, the proposed management plan is unrealistic and will serve no one, other than the no-growth advocates, those environmentalists and historians, who were largely instrumental and the principal driving force behind the purchase of the property four years ago, also the development of the current management plan and those who would like the entire property left untouched and remaining as it is today.

Unless the plan is revised to include economic development that will generate tax revenue for county- and state-funded improvements to the environmentally and historically sensitive portions of the property, then what you have seen at Chapman's Landing for the past four years and what you still see today, is what you will continue to see in the future: locked gates and limited access.

I have lived in Indian Head for more than 40 years. I have lived on Chapman's Landing Road for 27 of those years.

I have spent countless hours on the Chapman's Landing property. There is no "Chapman Forest."

By definition, there is no dense growth of large trees on the property to qualify as a "forest." There are approximately 2,000 acres of secondary growth woodland on the entire tract. More than half of that land, on the south side of Route 210, as well as the now infamous "triangle," was the recently logged Glatfelter Pulpwood Tree Farm property. The majority of the north side of Route 210 was cleared farmland and a Potomac River steamboat landing site in the 19th and 20th centuries. The entire woodland floor is littered with dead, fallen and decaying trees. Take a ride down Chapman's Landing Road, before the leaves block the view, and see for yourself. It's not a forest and it's certainly not scenic or beautiful. It's more like a testimonial to the distressed and failing economy of the Town of Indian Head. . .

All that aside, the majority of the people of Indian Head, people of western Charles County as well as people of entire state of Maryland could be better served with a plan that would provide for economic development that would pay for itself by generating revenue and still protect the environmental and historic values of this property.

It's a tough enough job for the Indian Head town managers and the county commissioners to balance a budget with increasing demands for tax dollars and decreasing revenue. To make those matters worse, 2,200 acres have been removed from the Charles County real estate tax base. If only half of the acreage were developed (not affecting any sensitive areas) to include commercial, business and residential property, it could generate millions of dollars in tax revenue annually. . . .

The waterfront property of Chapman's Landing is one of the last remaining open parcels of land with two miles of shoreline along the Potomac River between Indian Head and Washington. It's an economic diamond-in-the-rough. It can be responsibly developed into a western Charles County economic, environmental and historic showcase.

Imagine, if you will, on the north side of the property, a prestigious Potomac riverside convention center with a championship golf course, a hotel, conference center, restaurants, specialty shops, a marina, a riverboat transportation center, a boardwalk, a cultural, environmental and historical center with nature trails traversing the entire area.

Continue to imagine a complete, all-inclusive, sports complex for the youth of western Charles County that could be developed on the south side, off Route 210, where an entrance road and the woodland has been already cleared by the previous owners and is relatively level. There's adequate room for everything that the parents of the children in the Indian Head-Bryans Road area have been pleading for in the way of sport recreational facilities. Unlike Ruth B. Swann Park, water and sewage are accessible in the immediate area. This section of the property already has two production wells drilled into the deep Patuxent Aquifer and the location is adjacent to the Mattawoman Waste Water Treatment Plant feeder line. Also, unlike Ruth B. Swann Park, there is safe space for parking in the immediate vicinity well off the traveled highway.

This area has approximately 1,400 acres of woodland terrain and several maintained clear right-of-ways that could provide ample space for equestrian activities including excellent trail riding locations with space for parking trucks and trailers.

Mix in with all this a business center with office space for upscale, high-tech companies and other professionals, a few stores and restaurants along the Route 210 corridor and several small complexes of one-acre residential building lots on the portions of the property that are level and close to existing Route 210 and Chapman's Landing Road.

This could be a win-win for all the people involved. New businesses and the spin-off businesses and organizations that would grow to support them as well as growth in local employment would reinvigorate the economy of Indian Head and the entire western Charles County, not to mention the increased tax revenue generated for the state and county.

All this can be accomplished while still preserving the environmentally sensitive and historic portions of the

property. Mount Aventine, the historic manor house, had restoration work done by the previous owners over five years ago. Without funding to continue to maintain the structure, it will continue to deteriorate. The DNR officials stated that they do not have money in the budget allocated to maintain the building or do anything on the property. Any developer of the waterfront area property would surely be interested in improving and maintaining the building contingent on doing business here. The manor house and the surrounding acreage could be completely restored and become the centerpiece of the Chapman's Landing community.

Our county commissioners and local leaders have requested that Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. revisit the issue of Chapman's Landing with consideration for the economic viability of western Charles County as well as for the environment and historic preservation. We have the technology and safeguards today to be smart developers as well as good stewards of the environment.

The entire 2,200 acres of Chapman's Landing are not environmentally or historically sensitive.

Why force the citizens and businessmen of the western Charles County to be economically locked into a time capsule forever in the name of historic and environmental preservation of an overgrown tree farm and an 18th-century plantation with a few endangered plants and the crumbling remains of a few old log cabins?

Let's reconsider the negative economic impact of the rationale behind preserving the environmental and historic attributes of this valuable piece of property by doing absolutely nothing with it as opposed to what can be done to make it work positively for everyone concerned.

There's still time and space enough to have it both ways at Chapman's Landing.

Sal Kasubick

Indian Head

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